



# Ola Lokahi

Creating a Healthy Hawaii Together

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*The mission of the Department of Health is to protect and improve the health and environment for all people in Hawaii. We believe that an optimal state of physical, mental, social and environmental well-being is a right and responsibility of all of Hawaii's people.*

## DOH Expands 'Choose Healthy Now' Campaign

**H**old the candy, soda, and hot dogs! Convenience food store chain 7-Eleven has joined Aloha Island Mart and KTA Superstores in providing healthier alternatives that satisfy customers' snack and drink cravings.

Just look for items labeled *Choose Healthy Now* at any one of 7-Eleven's 64 participating retail locations. Signs and labels identify products that help customers make a healthy and quick snack choice.

*Choose Healthy Now* was originally developed by the Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) to encourage residents to choose healthier snacks and drinks.

"With the addition of 7-Eleven's important commitment to health, *Choose Healthy Now* is in grocery and convenience stores, hospital cafeterias, and snack shops at more than 145 locations across our state," said **Lola Irvin**, Chronic Disease Prevention & Health Promotion Division administrator. "Partnering with retail locations allows us to reach Hawaii residents where they make their everyday food choices."

*Choose Healthy Now* items meet the department's nutritional guidelines so you can be sure that when you buy one of these products, it meets the criteria for a healthy diet.

In general, *Choose Healthy Now* snacks are under 200 calories; lower in saturated fat; sodium, and sugar; and include items such as lightly-salted nuts, unsweetened tea, fresh fruit, plain yogurt, and fresh salads.

The *Choose Healthy Now* campaign

emphasizes healthy eating, which is key to reducing obesity and other chronic diseases. Currently, more than 50 percent of Hawaii's adults are overweight or obese and more than 50 percent have type 2 diabetes or prediabetes.

Hawaii's First Lady, Mrs. Dawn Ige, helped to launch the campaign at 7-Eleven's Moanalua store location on Sept. 8. She also unveiled her new "Mrs. Ige's Cilantro

Chicken Sandwich" which will be available for sale at 7-Eleven locations across the state by the end of the year. Mrs. Ige has been a champion for the campaign since it first began in May 2014.

*Choose Healthy Now* originally launched with six snack shops in state and federal government buildings on Oahu. Today, the campaign can be found in nearly 150 grocery and convenience stores, hospital cafeterias, and snack shops statewide.

Visit [www.ChooseHealthyNowHawaii.com](http://www.ChooseHealthyNowHawaii.com) for a full list of participating retail locations.



(from left): First Lady Dawn Ige, 7-Eleven President/CEO Greg Hanna, DOH Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Division Administrator **Lola Irvin** and DOH Deputy Director **Keith Yamamoto** at the Sept. 8 launch of "Choose Healthy Now."

# The Aftermath of Suicide *DOH Employee Finds Peace in the Midst of Grief*

**K**athleen Merriam's world came to a screeching halt when hearing that Michael, the youngest of four siblings in her family, took his own life. Although it happened well over a decade ago, she still vividly remembers the phone call on Sept. 13, 2005 at 4:16 p.m. telling her that Michael was gone.

"I remember it like it happened this morning," said Kathleen, Adult Mental Health Division (AMHD) case management and psychosocial rehabilitation service coordinator. "There was a lot of screaming and crying. I kept hoping that maybe they could revive him somehow."

Her brother attempted suicide twice before but ended up in the emergency room. Kathleen pleaded with the hospital to keep him confined but doctors decided he was not a danger to himself and ordered him discharged. A social worker by training, Kathleen planned to move closer to Michael to keep an eye on him, but her brother was determined to end his life.

September was National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, and activities were held across the state to raise awareness about suicide and to connect victims' family members with postvention services.

Statistics show that suicide is the leading cause of fatal injuries for people

ages 15 to 44 and is the ninth leading cause of all deaths in the state. From 2012-2016, there were 887 deaths from suicides in Hawaii. On average, one person dies by suicide every two days in our state.

"Suicide is a difficult problem for people to talk about," said **Nancy Deeley**, DOH suicide prevention coordinator. "People should not feel that they're all alone. There are suicide prevention resources and available help for at-risk individuals and loved ones of suicide victims."

DOH collaborates with the Prevent Suicide Hawaii Task Force and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention to provide evidence-based suicide prevention and postvention trainings, group support for survivors of suicide, and public awareness events throughout the year.

Coping with Michael's suicide was very difficult for Kathleen and recovery took one step at a time. For the moment, she has found a place of peace.

"It's not really closure but I have forgiven Michael," she said. "I also believe that Michael is with me. He inspires me at work and in my life."

Kathleen's family members do their best to keep their memories of Michael alive. They go out to dinner on his birthday and anniversary of his death, display his framed picture with a candle

at every major holiday, and specifically mention his name in family prayers.

Sharing Michael's story with others has also helped Kathleen to heal. She has made it her life's mission to help create a "suicide safer" community by joining suicide awareness and prevention campaigns and paying more attention to the emotional well-being of those around her. For Kathleen, suicide should no longer be a taboo topic for discussion.

"There is so much shame and stigma about getting help, but it takes a strong person to reach out and seek help," she said. "We should be conducting suicide prevention activities in clinics, schools, colleges, and wherever people gather. It's a topic that affects a large number of people."

For help, call the Crisis Line of Hawaii at 832-3100 or the National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

**"I thought I could have saved him. After all, I'm a social worker and I know what despair is."**

*- Kathleen Merriam, AMHD service coordinator on her attempts to help her suicidal younger brother*



*Representatives from state government, the Legislature, private organizations, military and the community gathered in Gov. David Ige's office at the State Capitol last month to recognize September as Suicide Prevention Awareness Month in Hawaii.*



# Health News & Tidbits

## NEW DOH DENTAL DIRECTOR

**G**avin Uchida, DDS, MBA has been named the department's new dental director. His responsibilities include improving the oral health of Hawaii residents by implementing strategic initiatives that promote oral hygiene through the prevention as well as treatment of oral disease.

Gavin has been a pediatric dentist since 2005 and is certified by the American Board of Pediatric Dentistry. He is in private practice on Oahu and Hawaii Island, and is on staff at Kaiser

Medical Center and Shriners's Hospital for Children in Honolulu.

Born and raised in Honolulu, Gavin graduated from St. Louis School, earned a bachelor's degree from the University

of Washington, received a doctorate from the University of California-San Francisco, and completed his residency in pediatric dentistry at the University of Texas-San Antonio. He also earned an MBA from Duke University.

"As a practicing dentist, I see firsthand the high rates of dental disease in our state," he said. "I decided I wanted to actively help on a larger scale, and joining the Department of Health was an opportunity for me to be part of a team of professionals who contribute to a better Hawaii by working to elevate the health and wellness of our community as a whole."

## DISABILITIES DIVISION HEAD SPEAKS AT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

DOH Developmental Disabilities Division administrator **Mary Brogan** was among the keynote speakers at the 33rd Annual Pacific Rim

International Conference on Disability & Diversity, held Oct. 9-11, 2017 at the Modern Honolulu and the Hilton Hawaiian Village in Waikiki.

Mary's presentation, entitled "Transforming for Community Integration from the Inside Out," detailed how the division is committed to systemwide change through a movement called Possibilities Now! DOH employees who work with people with disabilities benefited from attending the conference.

"As people with disabilities gain greater autonomy and opportunities for self-direction, it is important for people throughout DOH to become aware and look for ways to improve our programs to better support the population," Mary said.

The conference featured perspectives about disabilities and research by experts from around the world. Topics covered included advancing diversity, respect and human rights for people with disabilities, best practices and innovation in the provision of services.

## WE'RE NUMBER ONE!

Hawaii has the most efficient healthcare system in the U.S., according to data compiled by financial news company Bloomberg. Hawaii residents lived two years longer than the national average of 79 years, benefiting from four decades of employer-paid insurance, generous Medicaid benefits, and favorable demographics. The ranking reviewed and compared life expectancy, health care costs per capita, and cost as a percentage of state gross domestic product.

Hawaii's death rate—the age-



Mary Brogan

adjusted share of people dying— was 588.7 for every 100,000 people, the lowest in the U.S. and well below the national average of 724.6.

## LIVING HEALTHY @ WORK

DOH launched its worksite wellness program this summer called Living Healthy@Work. The program is based on the department's strategic plan to "Make Health Hawaii's Shared Value." Employees are benefitting from the program which integrates health-related activities into the work day.

**Laurie Nagai-Morgan**, secretary to DOH Director Dr. Virginia Pressler, volunteered as wellness coordinator for the director's office. Laurie has conducted a mini-stretching exercise demonstration, discussed the health risks and disadvantages of sitting for periods of an hour or longer, and provided information from Kaiser and HMSA about wellness programs and online resources. She also shared the benefits of a 10,000- step daily walking routine and other health related



Laurie Nagai-Morgan

activities. She is planning more mini-exercise sessions and other activities in the future.

"With all of the daily pressures that come with our jobs, families, and lives,

our personal health and well-being can sometimes take a back seat. If we work together as a team at the office, we can inspire each other to make positive choices each day that benefit our health. Making small adjustments—such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator and periodic stretching throughout the day to relieve tension—can add up and lead to lifelong healthy habits that we can take with us beyond our normal office hours."